

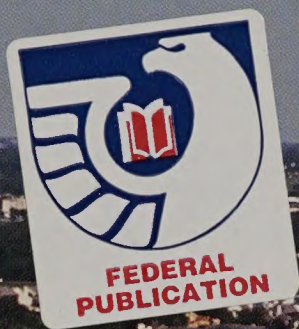
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Farmland Protection Program

– an alternative
to losing
prime farmland
to urbanization

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Farmland protection programs are meant to help promote organized growth, and to prevent leapfrog development into agricultural areas.

What the Farmland Protection Program does

The farmland protection program offers financial incentives to producers who choose to keep their land in agricultural production rather than being developed for urban uses. A voluntary program, it helps protect farmland from residential and commercial development by offering matching funds to state, tribal and local governments to purchase agricultural easements on productive farmland. The easements are for a minimum of 30 years or may be perpetual. In cooperation with local programs, it:

- Frees up capital for producers to reinvest in agricultural operations, invest in retirement or reduce debt.
- Keeps farmland affordable for beginning farmers by removing the speculative value of the land for urban development.
- Encourages good land stewardship by requiring the implementation of conservation plans.
- Encourages the development of new farmland protection programs locally, offering much-needed financial assistance to state and local governments.
- Fosters national awareness of the need to protect farmland from development.
- Helps keep the best agricultural land in production.
- Promotes managed urban growth.

Why FPP?

In recent years, more than a million acres a year, a land area the size of three Iowa counties, has been lost from U.S. agriculture to urban development. And the rate of development is increasing. The Farmland Protection Program is intended to slow the loss of productive and unique farmlands.

How the FPP works

The Farmland Protection Program offers matching funds to state and local governments that have established farmland protection programs. These programs must have pending offers to purchase conservation easements from landowners on prime, unique or other productive soils that are threatened by development. The Natural Resources Conservation Service distributes FPP funds after publishing a request for proposals (RFP) in the Federal Register and online. When a state, local or tribal application for matching funds is approved, the NRCS issues a cooperative agreement that describes the transaction taking place, the easement cost, an estimate of the federal share and other details. It contains a reversionary clause that requires the sponsor to reimburse the federal government if the terms of the cooperative agreement are not enforced or the easement is terminated.

New houses along Highway 6 west of Des Moines towards Waukee are part of the urban expansion in central Iowa.



Local sponsor role

Local sponsors are state, local, or tribal governments—or in some cases, non-governmental organizations—who have a commitment to protecting agricultural land from urban development. When the local sponsors apply for federal matching funds, they must:

- demonstrate a commitment to farmland protection through use of incentive-based or regulatory farmland protection techniques.
- prove their capacity to monitor and enforce the conservation easements that would be purchased on agricultural land in the program area.
- provide at least 50 percent of the estimated fair market value of the land that will be designated for the conservation easement.

Funding

Federal matching funds for farmland protection are authorized by Section 388 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act. Funding comes from the Commodity Credit Corporation, the same entity that finances farm income support payments.

The 1996 Farm Bill established the program, and made the Natural Resources Conservation Service responsible for program implementation.

Qualifying land

USDA joins with local sponsors to acquire easements or other interests from landowners. USDA provides up to 50 percent of the fair market easement value; this value is usually the difference between the development value and the land use value. To qualify, the farmland must:

- 1) be part of a pending offer from a State, tribe or local farmland protection program
- 2) be privately owned
- 3) have a conservation plan
- 4) be large enough to sustain agricultural production
- 5) be accessible to markets for what the land produces
- 6) have adequate infrastructure/agricultural services
- 7) have surrounding parcels of land that can support long-term agricultural production

For more information:

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